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Hoosier Artist: D. OMER SEAMON

By FRED D. CAVINDER

WHEN D. Omer Seamon began life as an artist, his first job was in Minnesota painting posters advertising the new fangled talking pictures. Now, long established as a watercolor artist whose romance with Indiana nature never has cooled, Seamon is the star of his own motion picture.

Filmed by Keith Hawkins, supervisor of motion picture production at the Indiana State University audio-visual department, and Linus Haller, the movie on Seamon, his brush and his philosophy, recently premiered at Nashville. Seamon, who answers to the nickname of Salty, was on hand to greet his many friends in the art community and to utter his expected demurrs about the importance of himself on film.

SALTY ON CAMERA: "I've never spent any time in my life trying to impress anybody that I was an artist . . . I've never found it necessary to be temperamental, get mad or throw things. I'm simply a good natured guy who likes to get along with the world."

DOING A personal movie about a man and his work is somewhat of a departure for a university department which usually turns out work more directly related to education and "how-to" documentaries.

And, of course, it is a starring opportunity which comes to only a few artists in their lifetime.

"I met Salty when he was putting together a show," explains Hawkins. "I thought he was an interesting human being. I liked his work and so I thought, why not? It's the first of its kind that I've done at ISU. It's motivational, inspirational — I don't know exactly how you'd categorize it."

"I enjoyed it," says Salty of

his stint before the camera. "Just to take an ordinary guy doing a day's work and film it and make something out of it, seems to me like it's hardly necessary. I don't look at an artist being much different from any other guy getting up and going to work. I could never be an actor."

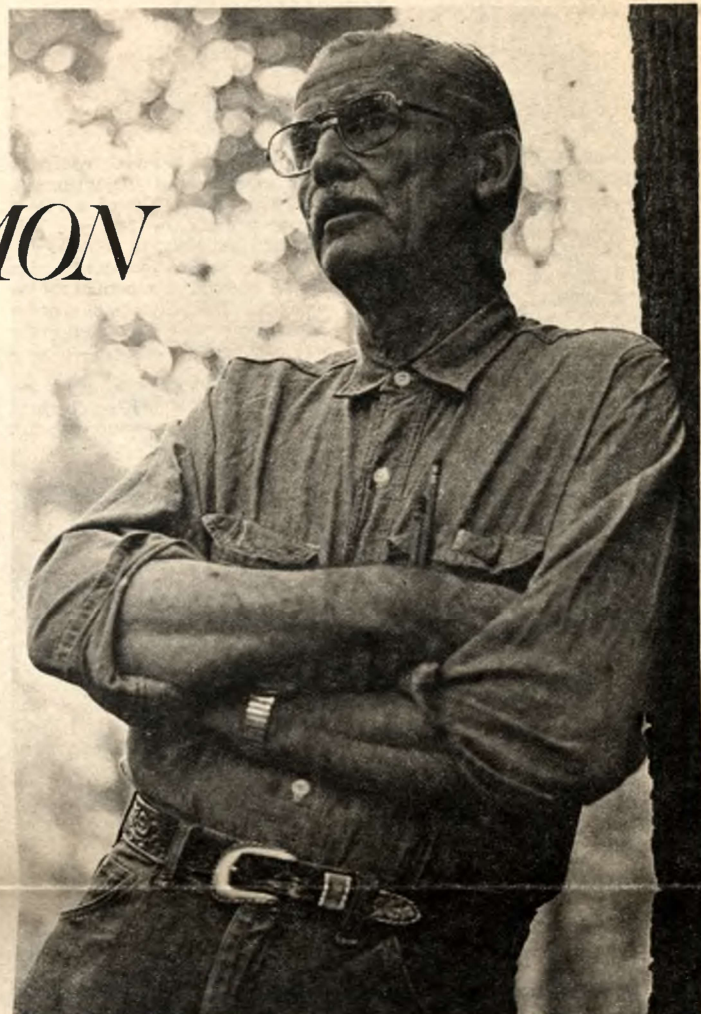
Salty doesn't have to act. He may look like a distinguished medical man, or a banker or professor. But when he talks the accent is pure farm boy, from a Gibson County heritage of which he is proud, and the philosophy is unadulterated Hoosier in the most delightful sense of the word.

Since 1935 he has lived in the woods north of Terre Haute. He has roamed most of Indiana looking for suitable scenes for his watercolor brush and, using artistic technique developed at a commercial drawing board instead of in a classroom, he has put an estimated 700 Hoosier pictures on paper. His paintings of covered bridges and old barns, both of which are passing from the current scene, he considers a small contribution to recording history.

"I like rural Indiana," he says. "I was born on a farm and lived there when I was a kid. Down to earth things, nature particularly — I never get tired of looking at it."

At 62, Salty has earned his living as a freelance watercolor artist for about 20 years. In between stints at the drawing board and trips to gather material for new pictures, he managed to build his own home and his own studio. Now he finds that making his own picture frames is almost as much satisfaction as painting and he is beginning to look longingly at a big supply of black walnut lumber he has put aside for making furniture.

SALTY ON CAMERA: "I like to work with wood. I build every chance I get in my spare time."



People forget that an artist has a hobby. There isn't enough time in the day to get everything done that I would like to do. Most people are looking for a 40-hour week. I'm looking for a 40-hour day."

SEVEN days a week, Salty is up at 6 a.m. He reads for 30 minutes because, he says, that is the only time of day he can keep awake and remember what he reads. His tastes range from National Geographic to books on archeology. His wife, Marjorie, spends about 15 minutes making breakfast while Salty sticks to his reading.

By 7 a.m. he is in his studio unless other activities, such as delivering finished work or a photographing safari, occupy his day. Sometimes he may quit the studio at 5 p.m., other days he may return after dinner for a few extra brush strokes.

"I may never finish a day's work at the same time but I always start at the same time," he says.

SALTY ON CAMERA: "I try to pick out subject matter that will appeal to others because, after all, I hope somebody will like the picture well enough to buy it. But, in the meantime, I get enthused about different things. I think the best compliment an artist can have is somebody likes your work well enough to say, how much is it, I want it, I'd like to hang it up."

"I think sometimes you'll be walking along and all of a sudden something's there and you really know that this is a good subject. It doesn't happen very often, but when it does I try to hang onto it."

WHEN SEAMON was in the seventh grade he won second

me if I'd like to write the script, I asked them if they'd like to come up to Maine and take out a lung."

Once when the film's producer Ingo Preminger asked him if he would like to meet the M*A*S*H actors, he replied, "I couldn't care less."

He likes to remind strangers that he is a conservative Republican and not a flaming liberal as he is labeled by outsiders who do not know him and judge him purely on the basis of the Swampmen's rebellious antics. The timing of the movie has a lot to do with his undeserved reputation, Dr. Hornberger feels. "The film was released in 1970, when much of the country was growing weary of the Vietnam war. Reviewers never got tired of pointing out its anti-war theme. But when you think of it, who is pro-war? The movie wasn't anti-war, it was anti-foolishness of the regular Army."

What Hornberger cares most about is his practice in Maine. He puts it before everything else on his schedule. Just about anywhere he goes, he can expect a woman's voice to blossom from inside his suit coat, "Dr. Hornberger, calling Dr. Hornberger." The doctor will lift the walkie-talkie to his lips and say, "On my way." Then he will be off for the surgical wards.

THERE ARE times when he has to spend an evening away from

his family, in a motel, which he describes as a kind of punishment. This happened to him on a Friday night recently in Maine and brought him back to the hospital where he had to practically camp at the bedside of a patient for the weekend. The only bright spot for Hornberger was that Ugly John was coming for a visit.

And maybe Hawkeye and others from M*A*S*H will be back in Indiana again some day for another get-together.

"He's sentimental and kind of the emotional type," says Dr. Drake. "He was thrilled and most appreciative."

Adding to the reunion memories was the unusual centerpiece which was put together by the Drakes with the help of Dick and Jodie Eisler, friends in Evansville. Besides an old Army helmet and an old issue of the Stars and Stripes, the centerpiece included a syringe, miniature helicopter, little golf clubs, icicles, a tooth and miniature ambulance and tents.

"Of course, some of the wives never had met," recalls Mrs. Drake. "When we got on that bus (used to transport the group around Evansville) it seemed like the old Army days."

"One wife told me those were the worst years of her life when her husband was gone, but the reunion made it all seem beautiful. I think a lot of good came out of it."

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Dr. Drake (left) chats with some guests at the reunion party. Louise (Knocko) McCarthy (second from right) was a nurse in the war unit and Mrs. Drake's pal.



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"He who allows himself to be insulted deserves to be."

—Pierre Corneille

★

"Twilight, a timid faun, went glimmering by and night, the dark blue hunter, followed fast."

—George Russell



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On Paper And On Film



Seamon likes to paint colorful fall scenes like this one (above) of an area in the woods near his home. Other scenes, such as this one entitled *Hanging the Show*, (below) have a Hoosier flavor. He often takes cameras with him and snaps numerous photographs which he may use later in a painting.



Back in the studio, Salty uses his photographs as a guide, adding his own touches to produce a finished piece of work. Mrs. Sea-

mon, meanwhile, is an occasional critic.

"She'll come in and I'm working on something and she'll



Working in his studio seven days a week, Salty sticks to realism because he understands it and feels others look for this.

say, that's crooked. I figure if it looks crooked to her it's going to look crooked to everyone else who views it, so I take a real good look at it then and change it."

★

SALTY ON CAMERA: "Art's a little like looking up words in a dictionary. If you look up five new words a day, you've added five new words to your vocabulary. If you make five quick sketches of hands, feet or a squirrel, whatever's happening, you've added this much to your knowledge of drawing. The best teacher in the world is that next sketch you're going to make."

★

SEAMON works with few delays. It is, he says, the result of commercial training. Production is sometimes necessary there, and watercolors or tempera are the mediums used because they don't require drying time like oils.

"Now I'm getting too old for oil because it would take a lot of time to learn," he says.

It was during early days at Terre Haute that Seamon got his nickname. A co-worker had trouble remembering his last name.

"I said Seamon, and he said like the ocean, and I said yeah, and he said well, I'll call you Salty. That's the way it started. I haven't any qualms about being

Continued on Next Page

place in a poster contest and decided art was a good thing. While working as a window trimmer at Evansville, he took a home study course from a school in Minneapolis. This led to his job there with Paramount Studios. Later he came to Terre Haute as art director for a poster making firm. During three years in the Army in World War II he painted nearly a hundred landscapes in the South Seas.

Returning to Parke County after the war, Seamon married Marjorie, a widow with one child. The couple had dated about 10 years.

Marjorie often accompanies him in the Dodge stationwagon or the Chevrolet Impala on picture-taking trips. "When there's a fresh snow comes on, we'll grab a couple of cameras and maybe a sandwich and go out all day. I work on the theory if you take 50 pictures and get one good one, you're lucky."

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called Salty. I've been called worse."

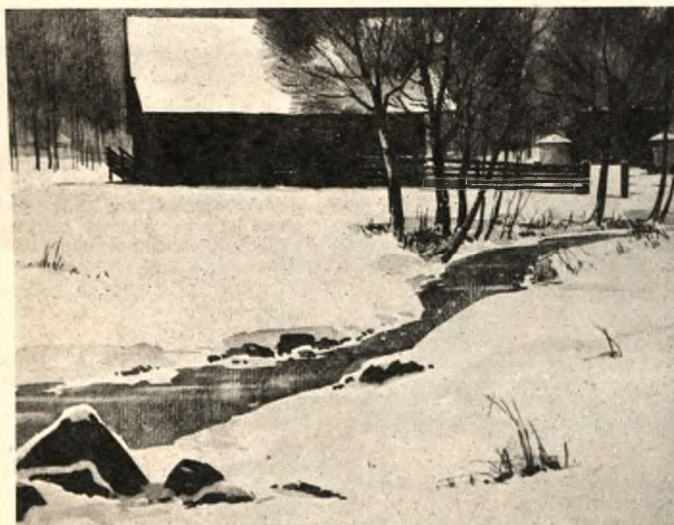
Much as Salty likes to paint and work with wood, he seems to like to talk nearly as much. Never without a jocular comment, sel-

dom without a smile, he seems to be the kind of man who never met an enemy.

But his ease with man is matched by his affection for nature.



Seamon has painted numerous Hoosier barns (top) and considers these one contribution to recording history. He grew up in rural Indiana and admits he never gets tired of looking at down-to-earth things like bottom scene.



Winter scenes are among artist's favorites. He works quickly, with few delays.

SALTY ON CAMERA: "I think the things you like the best, you paint a lot of them. So I've painted quite a few trees. I think they're one of the best of nature's creations. Your first look at anything isn't as good as the second or third or fourth. And the farther you look, the more things you see. For an ordinary guy to come along and try to improve on it and paint it is something else again, but it's a lot of fun. I enjoy it and I'll probably do it as long as I live."

★

SEAMON IS a member of the Hoosier Salon, Hoosier Hills Art Guild, Indiana Artists, the Swope Gallery and the Brown County Art Gallery Association. Numerous of his works hang as part of permanent gallery collections and he has exhibited several one-man shows.

His art is not without his

own humor. One work, entitled *Two of My Favorite Aunts*, appears to be just an interesting piece of drift wood until close observation reveals the two ants mounted on the painting. For a twist on the song, *On the Banks of the Wabash*, Salty went to midstream, painting the view looking back and called it *Off the Banks of the Wabash*.

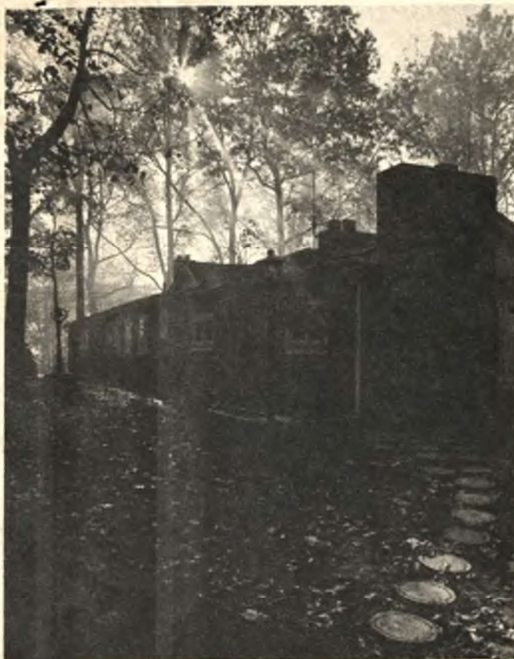
In addition to his freelancing, he still does architectural rendering and a few pamphlets, "for the bread and butter." A firm in Terre Haute produces limited edition prints of Seamon's work.

★

SALTY ON CAMERA: "I have a theory about art; if you like it hang it up. I stick very much to realism in painting simply because I understand it and I think most people looking at paintings look for this quality because they understand realism."



Salty has earned his living painting for 20 years, but still found time to build his home and studio and plans to build furniture from pile of black walnut.



The artist arises early in his Parke County home and is in his studio by about 7 a.m. Seamon married his wife, Marjorie, (right) after a 10-year courtship. They go out together to capture scenes he will later use in his realistic water colors.



"You can't beat doing and doing and doing over. I mean, out of that the law of averages will take care of a good one once in a while."

★

THERE IS little doubt that Seamon will mainly ignore his new movie career and continue working on the watercolor law of averages which has kept him in the comfort of his beloved Hoosier woods.

"It's the best thing that ever happened to me," he says of his 20 years as a freelance artist. "When you're working for a firm, they're usually producing a certain line of work and you're tied to that. Where freelancing, you can do what you want."

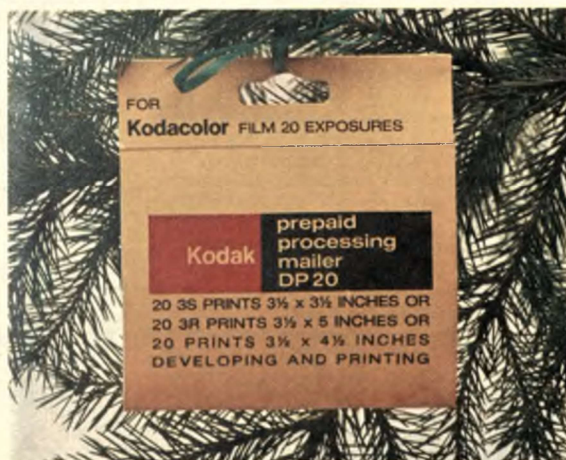
What Salty wants is a chance to wander around Indiana and paint her in her season hues. He prefers fall and winter because the landscape has a contrast then which he thinks enhances paintings.

"Most people will buy pictures with a little color in them," he said, then adds cautiously, "But not always. I haven't got it figured out."

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FORUM

THE READERS CORNER

By WILLIAM LEE FINDLEY

William Lee Findley, 46,
lives in Franklin with his family
of seven children.

MY GRANDFATHER, Robert Lee Findley was the last of a generation of old one-room school teachers and taught in several schools, mostly in Hensley Township in Johnson County.

Although he was born in Georgia in 1866, the family went to Missouri and then came to Indiana where he purchased a small farm. It was tended in summer and Grandpa taught school in winter. He was one of 10 boys and one girl in the family.

He had a great sense of humor and always enjoyed telling people that he had nine brothers and each one of them had a sister. This of course, led people to think there were 20 children until Grandpa explained.

I remember the few times my parents allowed me to stay at Grandpa's and Grandma's, always in summer time. When it came milking time, Grandpa would saddle the old bay horse, reach down and swing me up behind him and off we would go back in the woods to drive the two or three cows to the barn lot.

Grandpa milked with one hand, using a quart cup and emptying it into a bucket, set apart to keep the cow from kicking it over. My job was to hold the cow's tail and keep her from swatting Grandpa on the face.

Afterwards, Grandpa always wanted to race me to see who could drink the most milk, still warm from the cow. He wouldn't let me get my glass empty, but would keep filling it up so as to discourage me from trying to beat him.

GRANDPA was strong and straight. At 5-foot-11 in his stocking feet, he weighed about 185 pounds. He used to shake my hand when we met, squeezing so hard I would say ouch. When I would ask how he was, he would rub his leg and say: "Oh, I have

got a bone in my leg." Then he would chuckle.

The times were pretty rough and sometimes there was no recourse but to fight and Grandpa had several battles. I know he once broke a man's arm and another time he threw a man out of a school house door.

He was known as a strict disciplinarian, but was always fair.

In the book, *Some Came Running*, by Harvey Jacobs, my Grandpa is mentioned quite prominently in one chapter. He was Jacobs' teacher when he started to school and the Jacobs and Findley farms joined each others.

Jacobs said Grandpa would wave to him and walk to school with him sometimes, but when they reached the school house it was as if a veil dropped between them and Grandpa became all business.

Sept. 12, 1941, a warm day for the time of year, Grandpa saddled his bay horse and rode back through the woods to stack soybeans in a field. That is where some neighbors found him, dead, pitch fork still in his hand and his little dog beside him.

Now, whenever anyone asks me if I am related to Lee Findley, as they called him, I proudly say yes. He was my Grandpa and he was a man.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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